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Diatomite

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR • Donald Paul Hodel, Secretary

BUREAU OF MINES • Robert C. Horton, Director

This publication is a chapter from the current Bureau of Mines Minerals Yearbook, comprising *Volume I, Metals and Minerals; Volume II, Area Reports: Domestic; Volume III, Area Reports: International.* The separate volumes of the Yearbook are sold by the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Diatomite

By A. C. Meisinger[1]

The quantity of processed diatomite produced in 1985 was 635,000 short tons, a slight increase over that of 1984. Of the four Western States with reported production, California continued to be the leading producing State.

Diatomite exports declined 6% to 120,000 tons and comprised 19% of domestic production. World production was estimated to be nearly 2 million tons.

Domestic Data Coverage.—Domestic production data for diatomite are developed by the Bureau of Mines from one voluntary survey of U.S. plant operations. Of the nine operations to which a survey request was sent, 100% responded, representing 100% of the total production shown in tables 1 and 5.

Table 1.—Diatomite sold or used by producers in the United States

(Thousand short tons and thousand dollars)

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Domestic production (sales)	687	613	619	627	635
Total value of sales	$113,010	$107,619	$114,279	$120,926	$127,030

DOMESTIC PRODUCTION

Output of diatomite by domestic producers was 635,000 tons valued at $127 million, a slight increase over 1984 output. Diatomite was processed by seven companies in nine plants in four States. California continued to be the leading producing State, followed by Nevada, Washington, and Oregon.

The major diatomite producers continued to be Manville Products Corp., with operations at Lompoc, CA; Grefco Inc., Dicalite Div., at Lompoc, CA, and Mina, NV; Eagle-Picher Industries Inc. at Sparks and Lovelock, NV; and Witco Corp. (formerly Witco Chemical Corp.), Inorganic Specialties Div., at Quincy, WA. Other producers were Lassenite Industries Inc. in Herlong, CA; Cyprus Minerals Co. (formerly Cyprus Diatomite Co., a division of Amoco Minerals Co.) in Fernley, NV; and Oil-Dri Production Co. in Christmas Valley, OR.

Eagle-Picher, Reno, NV, began development of its open pit diatomite operation near Drewsey, Harney County, OR, in late 1985. Mining and processing was expected to be on-stream in mid-1986. The processing plant is near Vale in Malheur County, OR.

Grefco, Torrance, CA, began construction of a plant near Burney to process diatomite from the company's Shasta County, CA, freshwater deposits. The plant is expected to be completed by mid-1986. Initial plant capacity will be about 50,000 tons per year.

Whitecliff Industries was reported to have begun mining and shipping diatomite at Mammoth (near Tucson), AZ, in late 1985.

CONSUMPTION AND USES

Apparent domestic consumption of processed diatomite increased slightly to 520,000 tons. Domestic and export sales of filter-grade diatomite were 417,000 tons, compared with 418,000 tons in 1984. Sales of filler-grade diatomite were 137,500 tons, slightly above that of 1984. Diatomite used as additives and absorbents increased 10,000 tons to 76,000 tons. Insulation use decreased 35% to 4,200 tons in 1985, the second straight year of decline.

Table 2.—Diatomite sold or used,[1] by principal use

(Percent of U.S. production)

Use	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Fillers	23	19	21	22	21
Filtration	64	68	66	67	66
Insulation	2	1	3	1	1
Other[2]	11	12	10	10	12

[1]Includes exports.
[2]Includes abrasives (1981-82), absorbents, additives, and silicate admixtures.

PRICES

The average unit value of sales for processed diatomite increased $7 per ton to $200.

Table 3.—Average annual value per ton[1] of diatomite, by use

Use	1983	1984	1985
Fillers	$176.77	$175.10	$184.49
Filtration	200.16	210.60	220.80
Insulation	119.26	136.98	110.95
Other[2]	116.05	120.85	118.39
Weighted average	184.58	192.62	199.93

[1]Based on unrounded data.
[2]Includes absorbents, additives, and silicate admixtures.

FOREIGN TRADE

U.S. exports of processed diatomite declined 6% from that of 1984. Average unit value of exports, however, increased slightly from $232 per ton to $238 per ton. Diatomite was exported to 77 countries, and the quantity represented 19% of domestic production. The following six countries received 61% of the total: Canada, 25,500 tons; Japan, 14,000 tons; Australia, 13,000 tons; the United Kingdom, 8,700 tons; the Republic of South Africa, 6,100 tons; and the Federal Republic of Germany, 5,900 tons.

Diatomite imports totaled 4,950 tons, of which nearly 95% originated from Taiwan, compared with 338 tons in 1984, of which Mexico supplied 75%.

Table 4.—U.S. exports of diatomite

(Thousand short tons and thousand dollars)

Year	Quantity	Value[1]
1982	141	29,863
1983	146	31,569
1984	127	29,461
1985	120	28,519

[1]U.S. Customs.

WORLD REVIEW

World production of diatomite was estimated to be nearly 2 million tons, of which the United States produced one-third, followed by Romania, France, and the U.S.S.R. New data available in recent years show that Romania has emerged as a major world producer. The principal Romanian deposit areas are at Adamclisi, Partirlapele-Buzau, and Minis-Arad. Diatomite consumption in Romania has been oriented toward the building construction industry.

[1]Industry economist, Division of Industrial Minerals.

Table 5.—Diatomite: World production, by country[1]

(Thousand short tons)

Country	1981	1982	1983	1984[p]	1985[e]
Algeria[e]	5	5	5	2	2
Argentina	5	7	12	e11	12
Australia	2	2	e9	e9	9
Brazil (marketable)	10	14	e18	e18	18
Canada[e]	4	2	2	2	2
Chile	(2)	(2)	1	2	2
Colombia[e]	1	1	1	1	1
Costa Rica	1	1	e1	e1	1
Denmark:[3]					
Diatomite	4	r4	7	13	6
Moler	70	78	r e72	70	83
Egypt	--	--	(2)	e(2)	(2)
France	r e231	269	244	273	276
Germany, Federal Republic of	47	47	49	49	50
Iceland	22	28	28	30	33
Italy[e]	28	22	28	r31	33
Kenya	2	2	2	2	2
Korea, Republic of	46	61	62	53	55
Mexico	62	62	48	40	50
Peru[e]	8	8	8	8	8
Portugal	3	e3	2	2	2
Romania[e]	r320	r320	r320	r331	331
South Africa, Republic of	1	1	1	(2)	(2)
Spain	42	70	61	60	66
Thailand	(2)	(2)	(2)	1	1
Turkey[e]	11	11	11	r3	3
U.S.S.R.[e]	r254	260	260	265	270
United Kingdom	e1	e1	(2)	(2)	(2)
United States	687	613	619	627	e635
Total	r1,867	r1,892	1,871	1,933	1,951

[e]Estimated. [p]Preliminary. [r]Revised.
[1]Table includes data available through Apr. 22, 1986.
[2]Less than 1/2 unit.
[3]Data represent sales.
[4]Reported figure.

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